



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
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### **North Dakota Observes World AIDS Day *Department of Health Urges Testing for At-Risk People***

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is observing World AIDS Day December 1, 2005, by stressing the importance of testing for people at risk for HIV who do not know their status, according to Melissa Casteel, HIV/AIDS Program manager.

The 2005 World AIDS Day theme in the United States, *Action Makes a Difference*, addresses the importance of prevention, testing, treatment, and care programs for people at risk for or living with HIV/AIDS. At the end of 2003, more than 1 million people were estimated to be living in the United States with HIV infection. About one fourth of them were believed to be unaware of their infections, underscoring the need for increased efforts to reach populations at-risk with HIV testing and prevention services.

“It is so important for those who are infected to be aware of it,” Casteel said. “Studies show that people who know their status, in most cases, take the necessary steps to avoid transmitting HIV to others.”

The Department of Health urges anyone who has ever put themselves at risk for HIV by engaging in risky behavior – such as unprotected sex, needle sharing for drug use, or tattooing and body piercing – to get tested. HIV testing is available at test sites located throughout the state and staffed by trained personnel who offer free and confidential HIV testing and pre- and post-test counseling and referrals to those at risk. HIV can be prevented by avoiding or not engaging in risky behaviors.

“Low perception of risk, fear, stigma and discrimination continue to pose major challenges for effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care,” Casteel said. “Fear of discrimination may prevent

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people from getting tested or seeking treatment. Ultimately, that can prevent them from seeking treatment that could save their lives.”

As of June 30, 2005, 351 cases of HIV/AIDS have been reported in North Dakota since HIV/AIDS surveillance began in 1984. Most of the cases were between the ages of 20 and 39 at the time of diagnosis.

For information about HIV testing and other HIV/AIDS services, call the North Dakota Department of Health HIV/AIDS Program hotline at 800.70.NDHIV or visit the program’s website at [www.ndhiv.com](http://www.ndhiv.com).

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